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CORRESPONDENCE.

BIRDS OF THE GALAPAGOS ARCHIPELAGO.¹

Editor *American Naturalist*.

Sir:—The September number of the *American Naturalist* contains a criticism of my "Birds of the Galapagos Archipelago" which I have not answered sooner from want of time. I would gladly pass it by were it not that certain erroneous quotations and important misconstructions contained in Dr. Baur's "criticism" should not be allowed to stand uncorrected.

Regarding a certain missing box of specimens from the southern part of Albemarle Island, Charles Island, etc., Dr. Baur says: "I shall now make a few remarks about the birds from Charles, Hood, Barrington, and South Albemarle, which were contained in a box which disappeared in Guayaquil. The loss is not quite so unfortunate as stated by Mr. Ridgway. He remarks that it contained more than forty land birds from the southern part of Albemarle Island, but this statement, as will be seen from the list which I now give, is not correct."

In a letter (now in my possession) dated Oct. 12, 1891, Dr. Baur wrote me: "That *Creagrus* is a very common bird you probably have heard already from Mr. Adams; also, that we got *over forty species of birds from S. Albemarle*." In another dated March 1, 1892, he wrote: "One box containing other *small birds* has unfortunately been lost on the way, probably at Panama, and so far no trace of it has been found"; while in still another, dated April 29, 1894, he says: "It is a great loss that one box with small birds was stolen at Guayaquil. I see now that it contained the specimens from Charles, Hood, Barrington, and South Albemarle."

Since Dr. Baur distinctly wrote me, as quoted above, that he and Mr. Adams collected more than forty species of birds on South Albemarle, and later twice informed me they were *small* birds, it will be seen that I was justified, from the knowledge in my posses-

¹ With Mr. Ridgway's kind consent, his letter written Nov. 19, 1897, has been withheld from publication on account of the unfortunate illness of Dr. Baur, which prevented us from submitting the letter to him for comment or reply. Dr. Baur, being in Europe at present, is still ignorant of this letter, but it does not seem wise or fair to Mr. Ridgway to delay its publication any longer. — EDITOR.

sion at the time, in the statement which I made concerning the box in question.

With further reference to the birds of South Albemarle, Dr. Baur makes the following singular statement: "Ridgway enumerates thirty-five species from Albemarle, and remarks: 'As Dr. Baur and his associate, Mr. Adams, collected more than forty species in South Albemarle, there are at least twenty-five species found there which are as yet undetermined.' I cannot support this statement. Ridgway himself names thirty-three species collected by us." Concerning this I have only to say that reference to pages 469 and 470 of my paper will show that it is wholly unwarranted. The list of thirty-five species, thirty-three of them collected by Baur and Adams, given by me on page 469, is plainly not a list of birds of *South* Albemarle but of Albemarle Island *as a whole*. On page 470 of my paper are separate lists for "East Albemarle, opposite Cowley Island" and "South Albemarle," both copied from lists furnished me by Dr. Baur, the originals of which I still possess. The South Albemarle birds, as enumerated by Dr. Baur, number sixteen species. Having no reason to doubt Dr. Baur's statement that he and Mr. Adams "got over forty species of birds from S. Albemarle," and since "over forty species" would necessarily be equivalent to at least forty-one, and since sixteen subtracted from forty-one would leave "at least twenty-five species" to be accounted for, it would appear that my statement was strictly in accordance with the facts as known to me. Dr. Baur has named nine of the species which were unknown to me; therefore, there should be still "at least" sixteen unidentified species of South Albemarle birds. Not one of these nine additional species was included in the two lists of Albemarle birds which Dr. Baur sent me, nor were they contained in the collection which he sent for my examination. There is good reason, therefore, why they were omitted from my list.

It is difficult to understand why Dr. Baur should have criticised my remarks concerning the large white heron from Albemarle, given in my paper as doubtfully *Herodias egretta*, but which Dr. Baur is positive is that species. The doubts which I expressed as to the bird being that species were based upon Dr. Baur's description of its size ("as large as, perhaps larger than, *A. herodias*"), which certainly cannot apply to *H. egretta*. The latter is conspicuously *smaller* than *A. herodias* (only about one-third its bulk¹). There-

¹ Audubon gives the weight of *H. egretta* as two and a half pounds; *A. herodias* often weighs as much as seven pounds.

fore, it necessarily follows that either Dr. Baur's statement of the size of the bird which he saw but did not obtain is very incorrect, or else that my doubt as to its being *H. egretta* was very well founded. It would be interesting to know by what process Dr. Baur was able, under the circumstances, to positively identify the species.

In the "Additions to the List of Birds given by Ridgway for the Different Islands" (pages 782-84), I have found it difficult to find out exactly what Dr. Baur means to show; but in my attempt to do so have made one important discovery, which is that the species named, which are really additional to the lists given in my paper for the separate islands, were certainly not among the specimens which Dr. Baur sent me for examination, and therefore I cannot be responsible for the omissions. Many of the species which he names do occur in my lists, however, but in the case of most of these, *owing to the circumstance that no Baur-Adams specimens were known to me*, the "x" was not entered in the column for that collection. The importance of the portion of the collection which was not sent to me may be realized from the fact that, according to Dr. Baur's paper, his collection contained specimens of *Camarhynchus pallidus* ("*Cactornis pallida*") from Duncan, Chatham, and Jervis Islands, while he sent me only two specimens, one from Jervis, the other from James Island. Neither did I see a specimen of *Nesomimus macdonaldi* from Gardner Island; had I been able to do so, it is hardly necessary for me to say that the mistake respecting the identification of this bird to which Dr. Baur refers (see footnote on page 783) would not have occurred.

The remaining point upon which Dr. Baur's criticisms bear is the first one mentioned by him, and the one to which he devotes most space; but I prefer to consider it last and most briefly, since it is chiefly a matter of opinion, while the others are questions of fact. What are genera and what are not is, in many cases, very difficult to determine. To Dr. Baur *Cactornis* and *Geospiza* seem to be distinct, and to have them so would better fit his theory of distribution. To me they are not distinct, because it is impossible to draw any line between them.¹ It is, of course, disappointing to find sometimes that facts do not entirely support our theories; but it seems to me

¹ I would here call attention to Dr. Baur's erroneous quotation of my remarks on page 778, where, in the eighth line from the bottom, the following should be inserted after the first word: "I am still of the opinion that not a single character can be found."

both unscientific and unsafe to draw artificial lines of demarcation in such cases, even when Nature's neglect to do so causes serious inconvenience.

ROBERT RIDGWAY.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, D. C.,
November 19, 1897.

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